

TAPE

v.o. Angelus

This coming Saturday, Jan 18th, sees the beginning of the week-long annual time of special prayer for Christian unity. This whole month of January we've also been asked to devote to special prayer for peace in the world. The two things are not unrelated; but the important thing about both of them is that we do really try to pray sincerely, with fervour and trust and perseverance, for these needs of the Church and the world. As there is a time to study and a time to talk about peace, and about unity, there's also a time to pray — and that time is 'always and everywhere'. Particular times of the year, special days or weeks of prayer for some particular need are proposed by the Church so that we can intensify our prayer then and also pray together, as the one community of Christ, asking our Father with Christ — through Him for what we need. There seems to be today a decreasing awareness or valuation of the importance and need of prayer — an attitude which, if this is really true, is very hard to reconcile with the teaching and practice of Christ himself as seen in the gospels, and of those close and immediate followers of his who wrote the other books of the New Testament — to say nothing of the place prayer holds in the rest of the Bible. There certainly has been some change recently in the general understanding in the Church, of what prayer really is and how best to pray. But each of us individually, as well as corporately as members of the Body of Christ, must still grow in the mind & heart of Christ — or rather, this

mind & heart, attitudes and outlook must grow within each of us. And this is why we have to pray, in whatever way we can or find most congenial to ourselves. In this Midday Prayer programme, which is mainly reflection and formal prayer some of which are very familiar to you, my objective is to help you to pray, either during these few minutes while I'm speaking, by your turning your thoughts towards God our Father and opening your heart & mind to Him, or afterwards at your own leisure in the silence and quiet you make for yourself. And now for some music, again with the intention that it may help or encourage you to pray & reflect while you listen and I keep quiet for a bit. This music is itself a prayer, "Listen, O Lord, to the hymn & prayer which your servant offers today in your presence" — the setting may not suit modern tastes; it's more than 350 yrs old, by Giovanni Gabrieli.

Audi Domine
(R 146)

PRAYERS

When we have a special time of prayer, like the day for world peace, or the Unity Week which is coming up, it's usual to have a special Plan or Plans to mark the occasion. If it may seem ^{to you} a bit odd to have a special Plan when we wish to pray for unity, especially (seeing that our understanding of the Plan and devotion to it is one of the big points of division between us and other Christians), perhaps we need to take a close look at the Plan as a prayer to God. For us, this is the prayer that a Christian can or does pray — the whole of Christian life really centres on the Plan, and all our individual prayers, private devotions and so on have their value through the

fact that when we gather together for Mass, we are joining with Christ Our Lord in offering with Him, through Him and in Him the only perfect and acceptable prayer that human beings can offer to God. When we pray for anything, what we're doing (or should be doing) is putting ourselves in God's hands in trust & love, putting on the mind of Christ, as St. Paul expressed it. But where this is most directly and fruitfully done is in offering with Christ His sacrifice of love & obedience to His Father, which He has made it possible for us to do by giving us the memorial of His last supper, death & resurrection which we call the Mass & which He told us to continue to do in memory of Him until He comes again. The Eucharist is a thanksgiving prayer in which we offer with Christ the very event for which our prime thanks are being given. But praying for our needs is also part of it. Learning to make our prayer with Christ needs time, patience and practice for us to make ourselves really open to Him. Of course His grace is working with us - but that doesn't absolve us from effort; and if we're to be really reformed in the image of Christ thro' our participation in the Mass, we need to prepare ourselves beforehand - and this preparation is the prayer we continually make ourselves, for all our needs, in union with Christ. So, let us pray with all our hearts this coming week, that God's will be done in us, for His unity willed by Xp.